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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 001420

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [POLITICAL PARTIES](#)

SUBJECT: CHP DISSIDENTS: VOICES FROM ISTANBUL

REF: A. ANKARA 4042

[1B.](#) ANKARA 581

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Discontent among "dissidents" within the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) (ref A) continues to fester in Istanbul. The party's July 31 Istanbul Congress, which began in fisticuffs, left the provincial party apparatus firmly in the hands of supporters of CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal. Several CHP contacts complain that Baykal used unfair and illegal tactics to achieve victory in Istanbul. They unanimously believe that Baykal will run unopposed and retain the party chairmanship at a national congress this fall. Their views differ, though, about whether to address the CHP's lack of internal democracy through conventions and law suits or by forming a new party. End summary.

Istanbul Congress: We have a contender

[¶2.](#) (SBU) On July 31, the Republican People's Party (CHP) held its Istanbul Congress to elect a new provincial leader. Representing CHP Chairman Deniz Baykal and his supporters was the incumbent, Sinasi Oktem, who was challenged by former CHP Chairman Altan Oymen. (Note: Oymen served as CHP Chairman after Baykal resigned in the wake of CHP's 1999 failure to cross the 10 percent electoral threshold. End note.) Of the 624 delegates to the Istanbul convention, 124 signatures were necessary to nominate a candidate; Oymen received close to 150, contacts told us.

[¶3.](#) (C) The Congress began badly, as a scuffle broke out at the convention hall's entrance. Press reports state that "uninvited members" (comment: Oymen supporters) were denied entry by "Congress officials" (comment: Baykalistas); the scuffle was carried on national TV. (Fisticuffs also broke out during the CHP's national convention in January (ref B)). Later, with order restored, Oymen addressed the convention, and reportedly criticized changes made to the party's by-laws in recent years which increase from 5 percent to 20 percent the number of signatures required to nominate a candidate for party positions. Oymen also referred to a recent Constitutional Court ruling in favor of disgruntled CHP members who had petitioned the CHP to hold an extraordinary meeting to discuss the by-law changes, but who received no response thus went to court. (Note: The recent court decision said the CHP must hold a meeting within six months to consider the petitioners' complaints. Since the national congress is already scheduled for October, it will not be hard for the party to comply with the Court's ruling. End note.) At the end of the day, Sinasi Oktem took the votes of 387 delegates to Oymen's 213.

How they won

[¶4.](#) (C) It was over before it began, says former Istanbul Chairman and Oymen sympathizer Mehmet Boluk, because of the way delegates to the convention were (s)elected. Boluk claims the majority of delegates from 11 of Istanbul's 32 districts were "nylon" (i.e. plastic, fake), elected when Baykal supporters registered "new members" en masse at local level offices. He illustrated with an example from his home district on Buyukada, where the normally registered 115 members ballooned to 205 just prior to the vote for delegates. Normally, a new member is held in "temporary" status for six months before becoming a full member, but that practice is not being followed, he said. He pointed to municipal leaders in Kadakoy, Besiktas and Bakirkoy - three districts which alone account for 147 delegates - as being particularly influential in re-electing Oktem. Finally, Boluk said the timing of local-level elections for delegates was not in accordance with earlier party memoranda, and were held earlier than previously announced in many cases.

[¶5.](#) (C) Hursit Gunes, a businessman from a prominent CHP family, who flirted with the idea of running against Baykal for the party chairmanship earlier this year, added that local level party organizations sent "invitations" to vote for delegates this year. Invitations to Baykal supporters

were sent promptly, he said, while invitations to others "were sent to the wrong address."

¶16. (C) Ozgur Unluhisarcikli of the center-right ARI Movement told Ankara poloffs that the CHP administration also controlled the Istanbul convention by announcing pre-convention organizing meetings at one location, but then switching them to another location only Baykal supporters knew about.

Taking it to the courts

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¶17. (C) Boluk, tapping documents on his desk, told poloff that members had filed cases in the courts against the CHP based on the party's disregard for its by-laws. Boluk had assisted in preparing a case in Istanbul questioning the membership credentials of hundreds of delegates to the convention. He told us that the district-level election commission issued an unfavorable decision in that case, but the high election commission in Ankara sided with the plaintiffs. Nevertheless, he said, the political party law maintains that district level commissions prevail in such disputes, thus the Ankara decision provided no remedy. Dissidents within the party will continue to use the judiciary to fight the unfair and, in many cases, they say, illegal, practices Baykal supporters are utilizing to keep a firm grip on the party, Boluk said.

October convention

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¶18. (C) Unlike some contacts who believe the fall convention might be canceled (ref A), Boluk, Gunes and CHP MP Damla Gurel expect it to go forward, with Baykal standing as candidate and easily winning with votes from as many as 1000 of the approximately 1300 delegates. They all agreed that it would be next to impossible for any other potential candidate to meet the new signature requirements, and they expect Baykal to stand unopposed. According to Gunes, "there's a one percent chance, but not two," that Baykal will hand over the reins to someone else after winning in October. He thought it most likely, however, that Baykal would lead the party into the next elections.

¶19. (C) Gurel, one of approximately 40 CHP MPs who have publicly broken with Baykal, believes he will never hand over party leadership. (Bio note: Gurel worked with the ARI Movement in the late 1990s. She was brought into the party by Kemal Dervis, and remains close to him, having just visited him in New York. She became an MP in 2002. She served on the CHP board for six months before resigning from that position, in a move she knows will keep her off the CHP list in the coming elections. She appears to have no plans to resign from the party, though, saying that joining another party as MP is "unethical" and going independent results in no power at all. End bio note.) Gurel says she has spoken at length with Baykal, and he firmly believes he is contributing to the "nation's salvation" through his party leadership, she said. And besides, where would he go? As a board member, she said, she realized that the prospect of change from within the party was hopeless.

¶110. (C) Comment: The antics at the Istanbul convention further undermine CHP's image, damaged by the fights at the January convention (after which one national newspaper carried photographs of the fighting beneath a headline reading "Oh, Please." End comment.

JONES